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ABSTRACT

This pamphlet is the fourth in a series of ten stemming from the view that language is central to learning, that teachers can gain insights into their work and into learning by examining the language of the classroom, and that current language theory can be the means to such insights. The pamphlet presents a case study of a third grade student with behavior and language problems. The various sections contain the following: background information about the student, discussions of his classroom behavior and of his language problems, teacher strategies for use in fostering language development, a description of a strategy used to develop the subject's oral language skills through writing, and suggestions for classroom organization to facilitate an individualized approach to learning. Selections from the subject's written work and excerpts from transcripts of classroom interactions are included. An appendix contains a copy of objectives for teacher/child dialogue. (FL)

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Language in the Classroom: A Series. 4

TALKING, WRITING AND LEARNING

Marilyn R. E. Harrison

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3. Some Dimensions of Expressive Language
4. Talking, Writing and Learning
5. Students Speak Out
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FOREWORD

This pamphlet is one of a series, produced as discussion papers by a group of teachers who participated in a graduate course in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction at the University of Calgary. In development, the papers reflect the method of the boys of Barbiana: each paper has been shaped and tempered, through several stages by the input of the group. In intent, the series reflects the aims of the pamphlets originated by the Writing Across the Curriculum Project Team of the Institute of Education at the University of London, to whom we are indebted for pointing the way.

The series stems from a view that language is central to learning, that teachers can gain insights into their work and into learning by examining the language of the classroom, and that current language theory can be the means to such insights. Further, the series represents a conviction that teachers are in the best position to understand the heuristic role of language in the classroom as well as to assess the needs of children in the schools and that they are the most likely to find solutions for problems in classroom practice. To realize this potential and to extend their influence, teachers need to offer their ideas and experiences freely and be willing to consider the ideas of their colleagues openly. It is in this spirit of sharing that these pamphlets are published.

We are grateful to Al Kahanoff, Principal of Branton Junior High School in Calgary for his generous editorial assistance and for his help in seeing the pamphlets through publication.

We also wish to thank Miss Lorraine Cockle for the cover design.

James Britton
Merron Chorny

TALKING, WRITING AND LEARNING

> It can hardly be doubted that the talk of young children is the direct precursor of their later thinking.[1]

> [We have been striving] . . . to draw attention to the nature of children's talk, and to children's dependence on adults for initiation into subtle and more complex uses of language. We are seeking to persuade the teacher not to dismiss children's talk as 'just talk,' not to see talk as incompatible with learning. Our plea is that talking should be recognised as providing, for young children at least, the major route to learning. . . . It is the child's capacity for talking that should be used for extending his thinking, for developing ways of using language that will serve him well, and that will provide him with strategies for learning.[2]

At a recent Parent-Teacher Meeting, dominated by one or two parents, a father suddenly stood and spoke, haltingly, "Are...our children...taught...to talk...in school? I never... learned...to talk much...and now in...the business...world...I need to talk!"

Could it be that in our concern for developing skills in reading and writing, we are forgetting the importance of talk, not only for the purpose of conversation, but also for learning? Are we aware of how children are using language in talking and what skills need to be developed?

A recent study pointed out that even at the age of three there were considerable differences between two groups of children in the way in which they used language, although there was no difference between the groups in the amount of talk that was used. It was found that children, between the ages of three and five, given favourable conditions and opportunities, were able to use language:

- to protect their own rights and interests, and to maintain their own comfort and pleasure
- to initiate and maintain relationships with others
- to report on present experience
- to direct their own and others' actions.

But the children from educating homes [i.e., advantaged

children frequently exposed to varied uses of language] seem to have developed the following uses much more extensively than the disadvantaged children:
to report on past experiences
to collaborate towards agreed ends
to project into the future, to anticipate and predict
to project and compare possible alternatives
to see causal and dependent relationships
to give explanations of how and why things happen
to deal with problems in the imagination and see possible solutions
to create experiences through the use of imagination, often making a representation through the symbolic use of materials
to justify behaviour
to reflect upon feelings, their own and other people's.[3]

It is not that one group of children uses language, and the other does not, but rather that one group of children is disposed to use language differently from the other. Perhaps some conversations, reported by Tough, of two three-year-old sons with their mothers will clarify this point.

Mother puts Jimmie down on a chair at the table. He looks at the picture on the outside of the cereal packet.
Jimmie: What's that?
Mother: It's a submarine.
Hey--mind your feet--sit properly.
Jimmie: What's it do?
Mother: Did you hear me--get your feet off the chair.
Jimmie: What's that thing do?
Mother: What thing--oh that--it's a submarine. Sit on that chair properly, or else go out to play.[4]

In the second example, Mark is playing on the floor with a lorry (truck) while his mother sits nearby, knitting.

Mark: What's this funny thing for?
Mother: Let me look--oh yes, see it's a hook. Can you find something that will fasten on behind the lorry?
Mark: Yes--I see--well it might be a breakdown one [tow truck] couldn't it?
Mother: Oh, do you think so? What are breakdown lorries like?--do you remember?
Mark: I know--I know--'cos I saw one. At Grannnie's I saw one. It's not a breakdown thing--it hasn't got a big thing that pulls up.

Mother: A big thing? You mean a crane do you--that lifts the car up?
Mark: Yes, it lifts it up like this--off the ground to pull the car--the accident one you see.
Mother: And isn't this a breakdown lorry then?
Mark: No, no--it's only a hook. It's for pulling I think.
Mother: I wonder what it might pull.
Mark: I'm looking--perhaps a cart or a thing behind, like this.
Mother: You mean a trailer.
Mark: Yes . . . 5

These conversations are very different. Each time Jimmie makes an opportunity for his mother to extend his understanding, she responds with a direction. On the other hand, Mark's mother responds with what is meaningful to Mark, helping him to think about the function of the hook, encouraging him to recall past experiences and to anticipate possible actions and solutions to problems.

But could it be that Jimmie's mother chooses to use that type of language because he is only three? Might the pattern not change as he grows older? The following is a conversation with his mother, recorded when he was five.

Jimmie comes up to mother, hand clenched.
Jimmie: Look--look what I've found.
Mother: Just look at your hands--black bright aren't they?
Jimmie: Look at this thing--this ladybird--look it's right little.
Mother: Go wash your hands now--just look at the colour of them.
Jimmie: It's a ladybird. I want to keep it.
Mother: Go wash your hands now--do as I say--and put that thing down. Let it go--do you hear.
Jimmie: I want it--I want to keep it.
Mother: Whatever next. Go wash your hands and don't make a mess. You can have a biscuit then.6

Upon entering school, not only will these two children use language differently, but they will see the teacher in very different roles. For Jimmie, the teacher will be someone who gives directions whereas Mark will look to the teacher for information, discussion, and participation in behaviour controls.

The teacher then must make a conscious effort to assess each child's use of language when he comes to school, so that she might consider how best to help the child use language most effectively for learning.

The committee of inquiry into language and reading reaffirms the need for teachers to be aware of how children are using language:

> If a child has not had chances to use language in complex ways--predicting, analysing, making hypotheses, explaining (the use of language which Joan Tough's study showed that children from advantaged homes developed between three and five)--contexts and conditions in which children can develop these abilities have to be created.
> . . . "We advocate planned intervention in the child's language development."
> Teachers should have in mind different uses of language, and keep an effective record of every child's progress in them. These include reporting on present and recalled experience; collaborating towards agreed ends; anticipating and predicting; comparing possible alternatives; perceiving relationships; explaining how and why things happen; expressing tentativeness; creating experiences and dealing with problems in the imagination; justifying behaviour; reflecting on their own and other people's feelings.7

A teacher may feel she can foster these uses intuitively, without keeping a written record of "every child's progress in them." Let us take a closer look at what is involved.

DEAN - A CASE STUDY

Grade One - Dean was referred to the Visiting Teacher because of his near lack of verbal communication with either his teacher or peers. His report at the end of the year suggested that since improvement was reported by his teacher in the last few weeks in the term, probably experience and maturity were all that were needed. However, he should be watched carefully.

Grade Two - Dean was referred to the Psychology Department for tests because of behaviour and language problems. His tests showed average intelligence with below average verbal skills. It was suggested that "this boy should be watched."

Grade Three - January - Standardized Test - Dean rated in the bottom 10th percentile in language; 35th percentile in mathematics.

February 20 - Because of his stammering, a specialist was consulted but it was decided not to try to treat him at this time since drawing attention to his stammer might only cause him more difficulty.
March 2 - Dean's problems summed up by a professional: "After all, what can you expect with his home background?"

Is this then our attitude? Do we sit back and "watch" while Dean fails? We are concerned, but surely in this case we can wash our hands with a clear conscience: We have consulted all of the professional help available within the school system. We have been told "it's his home background." Other than provide a warm and accepting environment, what more can a classroom teacher do?

IN THE BEGINNING

I had just taken over Dean's class in early February. Having attended seminars on "Communication Skills in Early Childhood", a Schools Council Project under the direction of Joan Tough, I became very interested in finding out how third graders use language. Even after three years of schooling is it possible that deficiencies in the use of language, attributable to home environment, might still be found?

It was apparent that in this class the children had been encouraged to contribute to discussions. For example, during a fifteen-minute tape recording of a class discussion on the morning that Tina brought her dog, fifteen different children spoke. However, nine did not. Dean was among the children who did not participate in the discussion, although he has a dog at home and he was directly encouraged to contribute. In fact, it seemed to me that Dean was not using language at all in class, except when he would ask for directions from the teacher privately. Did his stammering make him reluctant to speak out?

I now turned to Listening to Children Talking, a guide to the appraisal of the child's use of language.[8] From the various charts suggested for use in obtaining a general view of the child's talk and behaviour, I chose one which would enable me to jot down any utterances so that I could record any stammering.

March 11			
Time	Activity	Character of Talk and Behaviour	Utterances
2:30	Talking to Garth at his desk. Class is asked to line up for Assembly...still involved in talking. Finally notices other children lining up and both boys go to the end of the line.	Friendly. (When Dean's other friend, Ken, lines up behind them, Garth says, "Oh, no.")	only one heard as lining up: "um, um, if you close one eye."
2:50	Dean sitting between Garth and Ken during Assembly	Dean is talking to Garth. All the children have been asked to put their hands in the air by the teacher in charge--neither Dean nor Garth seem to notice--they are involved in conversation.	
3:10	Working alone with Science experiment using an eye dropper	Absorbed in what he is doing.	
3:30	Brings Science experiment to teacher. (The remainder of the class stack experiments on the shelf, following instructions)	Approaches teacher	"Ah, ah, what should I do with this?"

From this observation it is clear that Dean does use language. However, it appears that he was not using language for the purposes of the school during this hour. He did not seem to hear, or he ignored, group instructions because of his peroccupation, first, with talking to friends, and secondly, with his experiment.

To obtain a clearer picture of what language Dean was using with his peers, I made a half-hour tape recording when the three boys were working on a project about the sea. I placed the tape recorder in the center of the three desks which were pushed together. Since I had been using the tape recorder regularly

to tape my own use of language in the classroom, the boys accepted it as a case of 'The teacher's desk is overflowing again' and they were not in the least concerned about it.

Garth: We'll just go like this...give a dab of glue here... and...maybe we'll staple them on...how about that... should we staple them on?
Dean: Yeah.
Garth: ...If this stays on.
Dean: Here's the little fish...Now to draw an octopus. See, ah, now...now someone's askin' me again to draw a good picture. Should he be on the top of the water? Do you want him to surface?
Garth: I don't care.
Dean: I'm going to draw him on the surface.
Garth: (to himself)...Staple for the fish. You want your plants stapled on, don't ya?
Dean: Yeah. Ah...we..we're supposed to switch plants aren't we?
Garth: Yeah, we will...sometime. Let's not worry about it right now.
Dean: Sh..I...sh..should I put a..a ship there? He's swimmin' after a ship?
Garth: If you want to.
Dean: Or should I just draw an octopus?
Garth: Just draw an octopus, probably.
(15 second silence while they work)
Garth: Then there's a...AH...(silence for several seconds)... put in his mouth...he bit a stink weed instead.
Dean: Yeah...ah..I..go..a..um..I'm gonna' draw the rest of them. Is that a..good?
Ken: What?
Garth: Look at the octopus he knows how to draw! I just don't know how he does it. Do you, Ken?
Ken: Um, yeah.
Garth: How does he do it?
Ken: I could do it...I could draw it here...I don't know how he does it.
Garth: Yeah, but you wouldn't do it that good.
Ken: He tries to draw his best, you know, 'cause he wants to.
Dean: No I don't!
Ken: Yeah. You do try to draw your best 'cause you done it once!
Dean: Yeah..Yeah..but..ah..but..I..I practised..but..but I started drawing in..in Grade 2.
Garth: At night I get so mad because I get so tired and I don't know how to draw anything...

Dean: I'll try...
Teacher: That's your picture, eh, Dean?
Dean: Yeah.
Ken: Eels have a real funny mouth, you know...(louder) Eels have a real funny mouth, you know. They have...eels have a mouth like that.
Dean: What are those...under those things sticking off?
Ken: I don't know what they are.
Garth: Guess what I just did? I stapled our book all together! (To himself)...tried stapling them...
Dean: Yeah, ah..ah..s..sometime..sometimes when I..I try my best..I..I..it comes out as a rotten picture, sometimes.
Ken: Yeah, same with me.
Garth: Yeah, it turns out good and you think you could make some better ones.
Dean: I know, and sometimes when you draw a picture and it looks good t..to .to you then..the...
Garth: I know what...I...I know what I...I know what job I would do if I was you when I grow up. Guess what job I would do if I was you?
Dean: What?
Garth: Artist.
Ken: You know what I'm gonna be when I grow up. Farmer.
Garth: You don't have to cut it out, Dean.

It is obvious that the boys are using language - to protect their own rights and interests, to initiate and maintain relationships with each other, and to direct their own and each other's actions, but they have not used language in any complex ways. The exchanges continue in the same manner, until, towards the end of the tape, Dean says:

Dean: Look..Look this fish swimmin'..swimming upside down. He's gonna' go shhhh and he's gonna' go tuuuuuu... right on him. Th..that's the whale's teeth...see he's gonna...
Garth: Put it back in...
Dean: Lo..look the whale...is that his teeth? I think that's his teeth...
Garth: I guess so.
Dean: or..or..or it could be...
Garth: Yeah...it's his teeth all right.
Dean: Wait...when he snaps down on something probably those are...are sharp pieces of hairs and..and he..he pokes th..the fish...and he pokes the fish...

Garth: You better keep an eye on Roger now, do you know why? You know why?
...unintelligable
Ken: Roger has?
Dean: Who has?
Several voices: Linda...
Teacher: Time to start cleaning up.
Dean: (As the teacher says "cleaning," Dean starts talking) Oh, but look it...um..a..I think those..are..are sharp hairs and when it bites and when it gets the fish in its mouth they...it..it..the hairs stick (talking quickly) into the fish and hurt it. It ha..it...
Garth: Will you put those two things away?
Dean: I..I..think those stab into it..its stomach...into its back...
Teacher: (Background) Dean...to the rug.

Dean has decided that the whale uses sharp hairs to stab fish. Once again he has ignored the class direction to come to the rug, being preoccupied with his own ideas. Since his friends were not interested in his ideas about the whale, and since Dean has been unable to approach the teacher for anything but directions, he may never find an answer to his problem.

I had noticed that Dean seemed to find it difficult to follow directions on his own, so I decided to make a tape recording on the occasion that Dean was given a Workbook (regarded as a privilege since only three children in the class had them). Once again, the tape recorder was accepted by the boys as the 'teacher's overflow from her desk'.

Teacher:(Filling in the chart on Dean's desk)

Silent Reading 8 and 9	Workbook p.1

Read page 8 and 9 in there and then do Workbook page 1.
Garth: (singing) Duba, duba...
Dean: See, it says read 8 and 9 and then Workbook p 1... that's page 1. Read 8 and 9.
Garth: (singing) Boom, boom be aye...Do you think it will be fun to work in that workbook, Dean?
Dean: What?
Garth: Do you think it's gonna be fun workin' in that workbook?
Dean: Yeah.
Garth: You don't know though, really, do ya?

Dean: Yeah.
Garth: Do ya?
Dean: (no response)
Garth: See, look it. (Reading) Sam sits on the...Sam sits on the...
Dean: (distracted) ...legs.
Garth: He wouldn't sit on his legs!
Dean: Oh.
Silence
Garth: That's one page.
Silence
Dean: There. I read 8 and 9. Now to do 1...page one in this Workbook...page one...do page one.
Garth: Got mine...
(To Ken) Paper cups are easy to make. Do you want to know how to make 'em? If you get me a piece of paper I'll show ya...I'll make you one...Ken, go get two pieces of paper.
Dean: It says "I am tall and sin [thin] even when I am wal.. out walking. Who is it?"
Ken: (To Garth) You...you...you're tall and thin and you wear glasses.
Garth: I KNOW!
Dean: (Impatiently) Someone wis' glasses...and is tall and... th..there's someone..s..see...tall...
Garth: And then, ya. Old...old ladies are thin. Ya, put that.
Dean: But it says glasses...see...sh..she's fat, he's fat...
Garth: Just put 5!
Ken: Who's fat?
Dean: You mean sin [thin]...See...she's fat, he's fat, she's fat, he's fat, he's fat, she's fat...
Garth: No..she's skinny...Skinny, skinny, skinny, fat, skinny, skinny...huh?
Dean: Fat.
Garth: Somebody that has glasses.
Another child passing by: That's running! [Points to tape recorder]
Ken: That's what? Is that on?
Garth: What? Is it on?
Dean: What?
Garth: That's on!

Dean seems to have to repeat the directions out loud in order to follow them. Yet the tape shows his high degree of concentration at a task -- he is not easily distracted by Garth's chatter.

From these observations we are beginning to form a picture of how Dean uses language for getting along with children and adults in the school, for maintaining his own well-being, and of how he responds to the materials and activities provided.

We could at this time also note the difficulties Dean has communicating by means of speech: the "s" sound for "th" which sometimes occurs; the stutter which seems more severe when he tries to communicate an idea in his head than when he is just discussing what he is doing and monitoring his actions. It is almost as though he wants to say something more elaborate and original, but finds it difficult to articulate the idea.

DEFINING THE PROBLEM

Let's turn now from the more social uses of his language, to concentrate on the cognitive aspects of his talk. Has he developed those ways of using language which will help him in learning and responding to the experiences provided in the school? Perhaps, as teachers, we intuitively help the child to extend his learning as we talk to him. We help him to formulate ideas, examine relationships, reflect and reason about his experiences, and consider the viewpoint of other people. We encourage the child to use his imagination and pursue individual ideas. But, it is only when we become aware of a child's weaknesses and inabilities with respect to the ways of using language that we can effectively foster his development in this area. Of all the people with whom the child has contact, the teacher may be the only person who is in a position, and who is able to deliberately encourage an expanding use of language. It becomes essential then that the teacher have these uses in mind when talking with the child.

To help identify the uses of language she is trying to foster, the teacher could use Joan Tough's "Objectives for Teacher-Child Dialogue" which is included in the appendix. Briefly, the objectives for Teacher-Child Dialogue should be:

1. To report on present and past experiences, searching for the fullest interpretation
2. To project beyond the observable situation
3. To project through the imagination
4. To approach logical reasoning.

With these objectives in mind, we will examine Dean's use of language, as he looks at two pictures from Listening to Children Talking.[9]

The first picture is of a startled lady who has just entered her kitchen to find two mischievous kittens on the table, having apparently tipped over two cups and the milk pitcher; another kitten is entangled in the yarn of some knitting which is on the floor, while another two kittens are fighting over a string of sausages. The mother cat is lying on a chair looking annoyed, with one eye closed and the other open. Unknown to them all, the fifth kitten, a black one, has slipped out the door. There is a burning fire of logs in the stove, an open cupboard, and a grandfather clock showing the time to be either 8:00 or 11:40.

Teacher: In this picture, Dean, what do you think is happening?
Dean: That cat's drinking milk...and those two cats are fightin' over the..the...ah.....sausages.
Teacher: Yes.
Dean: An' this cat's goin' out the door...
Teacher: It is!
Dean: And the yarn's all...and..and..that cat's..um..caught.. caught in the yarn.
Teacher: Oh! He's making a real tangle of the knitting, isn't he?
Dean: Yep.
Teacher: What else is happening?
Dean: And that cat's jumped off the table.
Teacher: And look what he's done on the table.
Dean: Yeah.
(pause)
Teacher: What else do you see?
Dean: Those things are on fire.
Teacher: Right. It's a different kind of stove, isn't it?
Dean: Yep.
Teacher: What kind of stove do you think it is?
Dean: An electric stove?
Teacher: Do you think so?

Dean: Yeah.
Teacher: And what do you think the mother cat is thinking--or doing?
Dean: (pause)...Winking.
Teacher: Yes. What do you think she's thinking?
Dean: (no response)
Teacher: What do you think the mother--the mother of the house is thinking? The lady?
Dean: (no response)
Teacher: What do you think she's thinking?
Dean: (no response)
Teacher: Do you think she's happy with what she sees?
Dean: No.
Teacher: What do you think she's thinking?
Dean: What?
Teacher: What do you think she's thinking? Do you think she's saying anything to the cats?
Dean: Yeah.
Teacher: What do you think she's <u>saying</u>?
Dean: (no response)
Teacher: Anything? Do you think she's scolding them?
Dean: Yeah.
Teacher: I imagine....I wonder where that black kitten is going?
Dean: (pause) He's goin' to climb up in a tree.
Teacher: Maybe he is.

In this first picture, Dean was able to pick out parts of the picture, stating what each kitten is doing, but he is unable to relate them to give a full answer. He makes an incorrect assumption that the stove is electric although he states "those things are on fire." Here the teacher missed an important opportunity--she should have identified those "things" as logs before asking what kind of stove it was. Her response "Do you think so?" to his questioning answer, "An electric stove?" was not direct enough for Dean. A more direct "why?" would, perhaps, have made him search for a reason. He seems unable to project into the feelings and thoughts of others and he cannot respond to the repeated question, "What is she thinking?"

Dean is shown the second picture in which a man, probably the father, is entering a kitchen with a black kitten in his arms. Three children are reaching for the kitten while the mother who is setting a steaming pot on the table, looks on. A

baby is sitting in a high chair holding a spoon in one hand and a cup in the other. A kettle on the electric or gas stove is steaming vigorously and the wall clock shows the time to be 5:45. In this picture he responds, again, to what people are doing, but he apparently cannot project into what they are thinking.

Teacher: Now what has happened here, do you think?
Dean: Someone found it.
Teacher: Yes, and what do you think he's saying?
Dean: (no response)
Teacher: The man in the picture...where do you think he brought the cat when he found it?
Dean: Outside.
Teacher: And where did he bring it to, then?
Dean: In the house.
Teacher: And what do you think the children are saying?
Dean: (no response)
Teacher: What are the children doing?
Dean: Looking at the cat.
Teacher: What do you think they're just going to have?
Dean: The cat.
Teacher: Do you think they'll have the cat?
Dean: Yeah.
Teacher: Do you think the children are asking if they can have the cat?
Dean: Yeah.
Teacher: What do you think they'll give the cat now, when the cat comes in?
Dean: Cat food.
Teacher: Do you think so? Anything else?
Dean: Milk.
Teacher: Probably. What's the mother doing at the table?
Dean: (no response)
Teacher: What do you think they're just going to have?
Dean: (pause)...Lunch.
Teacher: Could be that they're having lunch now. She has the cups there.
Dean: What?
Teacher: She has the cups out, doesn't she, and the tea pot.
Dean: Yeah.
Teacher: And what's happening on the stove? What do you see there?
Dean: The tea cookin'.
Teacher: Yes. You can see it. How can you tell that it's cooking?
Dean: The s..steam coming out.

Teacher: Yes. Is there anything else you can say about the picture? (pause) How do you think the cat is thinking?
Dean: (no response)
Teacher: What do you think the cat's thinking...do you think he's happy?
Dean: Yeah.
Teacher: I imagine...to find a nice house like that to come to.

Dean seems unable to project beyond the observable situation, not once responding to the question, "What are they thinking?" or even, "What are they saying?" He justifies the statement that "the tea's cooking" only when asked a direct question, "How can you tell it's cooking?" In both interviews using pictures, there is very little evidence of stuttering. Perhaps this is because he is responding to direct questions with short answers about what he sees rather than expressing an idea being formulated in his head.

How might a child who is able to use language in more complex ways respond to the same pictures? The following are interviews with Carl who, like Dean, is eight years old. Carl also stutters.

Teacher: Can you tell me what you think is happening in this picture?
Carl: Just like Amy.
Teacher: Who's Amy?
Carl: I teach her, I teach her.
Teacher: Oh do you? ...using pictures...and then she tells you what is happening in the picture?
Carl: Yeah.

(Carl has related the entire situation to his own experience. He has been meeting during school hours several times a week with a non-reading Grade One student, looking at pictures and talking about them. He immediately sees the similarity in what we are doing.)

Teacher: Tell me what you see in this picture.
Carl: The lady came home and she found all her...her...I think, her cats are in the house tearing up everything.
Teacher: What do you think the mother cat is thinking?
Carl: Boy...(laughs).
Teacher: Do you think she's cross with her baby kittens?
Carl: Yeah.
Teacher: What do you think is happening here? (Points to kitten

going out the door)
Carl: Oh, just runnin' away.
Teacher: Do you think so? Where do you think it's going?
Carl: (Points to the trees in the picture)
Teacher: What do you think about the stove?
Carl: It's on fire!
Teacher: What kind of a stove is it?
Carl: It's not electric.
Teacher: No, we don't use that kind now do we? It looks like what is burning?
Carl: Nothin'.
Teacher: Well, what do you think is in there? (Points to logs).
Carl: Wood.
Teacher: Probably.
Carl: It looks more like a pot-bellied stove that blew up.
Teacher: Yes, because usually you can't see the wood on the outside, can you?

Carl has qualified the statement that the cats belong to the lady with "I think". He recognizes that the stove could not be electric and compares it to a stove in his experience, "a pot-bellied stove". As we turn to the next picture, he displays the logical reasoning of which he is so capable.

Teacher: We'll look at another picture. I think it will tell you what happened to that black kitten that was going out the door...What do you think happened?
Carl: The black kitten got...ah...What was that other picture?
Teacher: It's back here...
Carl: The clock says twenty to twelve there...and its quarter to six here.
Teacher: So...what time of day do you think it is now?
Carl: It's in the day time.
Teacher: Yes,...and just about what time? Like quarter to six.. what would they be doing?
Carl: They'd be eating supper.
Teacher: Probably.
Carl: ...or just ending it.
Teacher: What do you think the children are saying?
Carl: (Falsetto) Hi Daddy, daddy...can we keep him?
Teacher: What do you think the mother's saying?
Carl: Ohhhhh, isn't it cute. (Laughs)
Teacher: What do you think the kitten is thinking?
Carl: Oh, goody, goody.
Teacher: What will they do now?
Carl: Oh, keep him.

Teacher: What do you think they'll give the kitten?
Carl: Cat food.
Teacher: Anything else?
Carl: Um...baby's left-overs. (Laughs)
Teacher: That would be good, probably, for a cat...wouldn't it...or a little kitten. Anything else?
Carl: (Interrupting) That's what we give our cat.
Teacher: Do you?

He immediately related the two pictures, exploring the relationship between the two clocks, deducing that since it is day time they must be eating supper. Then he qualifies that statement, realizing that they could be finishing supper. He has no difficulty projecting what the children might say and even affects their voices. Exploring what they might feed the kitten, Carl notes the baby in the picture and suggests "baby food". He now goes on to relate his own experience with a stove like the one in the picture, a cat, and a mouse.

Carl: Ya. He..he..my..my mother was just cl..closing the stove and the mouse ran..ran.. like..uh...th..the stove had holes in it...and..and the mouse ra..ran in..into one of those holes and the cat just...my..my mom just just p..put up the door and...voom...got it!
Teacher: Goodness, well...
Carl: Burnt to death.
Teacher: Burnt? Was it a cook stove?
Carl: Yeah.
Teacher: Not an electric stove?
Carl: No...Like, say here..here it is and the h..holes were down here and it got in here.
Teacher: Well, he got away from the cat at least.
Carl: Boy, did he ever!..Forever and ever!
Teacher: Yes...what do you think the mother's...what are they just going to have?
Carl: Looks like coffee or tea or whatever.

Carl, still thinking about his cat chasing the mouse into the stove, has lost interest in the picture.

In these short interviews, Carl has demonstrated that he easily uses language in the four modes that Dr. Tough would like to see teachers encourage when engaging in dialogue with children. He reported on present and past experiences when he related the episode with the pot-bellied stove, a cat and a mouse.

He had no difficulty projecting beyond the observable situation, even using a falsetto voice to demonstrate what he thought might be said. Using his imagination, based on a real life situation, he suggested the kitten might be given baby food. Finally, he logically deduced a time sequence from the clocks in the pictures, coupled with the apparent meals to come or just finished.

By comparing the responses of these two boys to the pictures, it becomes obvious that Dean needs a great deal of encouragement to enable him to use language in more complex ways. Having made an appraisal of how Dean is using language, the teacher's strategies in fostering his language development become crucial.

POSSIBLE STRATEGIES

We have noted that several of the teacher's questions in the tape recordings could have been re-worded to produce a different response. Many questions such as, "Do you think so?" are closed, eliciting only a "yes" or "no" response. A teacher must become adept at using language which will stimulate the child to make the kind of response she is looking for. To help teachers develop these essential skills, three main strategies have been outlined in Fostering Communication Skills: dialogue-objective, enabling, and dialogue-sustaining.[10]

The dialogue-objective strategies are open questions which indicate the kind of thinking the child is being asked to do. They are open, so the child can structure the response according to his own interpretation of what is required. If the child is being asked to project into the feelings of others, the teacher might ask, "How does the lady feel?"

Enabling strategies are less open and centre the child's attention on aspects that would help in the kind of thinking he is being asked to do. If the child seems not to have observed the lady's expression, the teacher might ask, "Is the lady cross?" rather than repeating, "What is she thinking?" This is in fact a "closed" question but it deliberately draws the child's

attention to an essential feature.

The dialogue-sustaining strategies aid the child to take part in the dialogue. These include:

1. Supportive comments such as "really?"
2. Focussing questions and comments and reminders.
3. Comments which encourage the child to offer further explanations, such as, "I don't know..."
4. Questions and comments which demonstrate the inadequacy of the information given.
5. The offer of information where a child shows ignorance.
6. Comments which remodel the child's comment.
7. Repetition of what the child has already said can be used with a suitable tone of voice.
8. Disengagement - ways of leaving the child which are supportive.[11]

A teacher will not become skillful in using these strategies immediately. It will only be through conscious effort, and some failure, that she will become more effective in eliciting the responses that will enable the child to use language in new ways.

NOT JUST TALKING

We have looked at how Dean is using language in talking and decided on strategies to help him develop more complex language skills, but, because Dean is eight years old, we have yet another aspectof his language to explore. Since "talk and writing are closely related and...talk can arise out of writing just as writing can arise out of talk"[12] we must turn to his writing.

Because it is very important that Dean learn to trust his teacher so that he might more readily talk to her, it was decided to develop a situation in which he would be writing as 'Child to Trusted Adult'[13] so that he might feel free to express his thoughts in an accepting atmosphere.

Diaries were prepared with blank pages for writing and drawing. The students were told that they would be given fifteen minutes each day to write about anything they liked.

Their work would not be marked or evaluated, but I would write back. I met with a mixed response. Several students announced, "We've done that", and others felt that diaries were private and not to be read by anyone else. I encouraged the latter group to fasten their diaries with a paper clip and assured them that their entries would not be read. The next morning the children to whom I had responded were enthused and at the end of the fifteen minute period all diaries were handed in, but not one paper clip!

Let's look at Dean's entries:

April 5
Dean: I went on a drive. one or two weeks from now we are Going to Drumheller to find some Dinnosaur Bones. We are going to Drumheller in our car. We are levaving early in the morning to Drumheller.

(picture of a Dinosaur)

Teacher: Dear Dean,
It will be exciting to look for Dinosaur Bones near Drumheller. I hope you find some. Then you can show them to us at school.

April 6
Dean: My Dog is 5 month old his name is rusty. I have a hamster her name is Oscar. John's hamster's name is Star. my Dad takes rusty out for a run some nights. my mum is out of the hospital. She is happy to Be out Because she Gets lonely there.

This is the first time that Dean has mentioned his home to his teacher.

Teacher: Dear Dean,
I was so glad to hear about your dog Rusty and your hamster Oscar. It's nice your Mom is out of the hospital. It must be lonely there.

April 7
Dean: I am on Double B ranch in treats and treasures. We were always going horse Back riding. that's what John liked. We went horse Back riding 3 or 4 times.

Teacher: Dear Dean,
You are reading Treats and Treasures very well. Do you enjoy horseback riding?

(The teacher asked about horseback riding, hoping Dean would express his feelings about it.)

April 8

Dean: Sometimes when we come Back from horse Back riding my Dog Doesn't like the smell of horse. there are alot of horse flies around there. I am on chater two in the Doudles B ranch in treats and treasures. it is fun riding horses, it is also fun Going to look for Dinosaurs. We will Be Going to look for them 1 or 2 weeks from now. My Dog is a Boy Dog. is Gentle. it never bites any one.

Teacher: Dear Dean,
I don't think I'd enjoy horseback riding if there were horse flies there. You are doing very well reading Treats and Treasures.
It will be exciting to go to look for Dinosaur bones in a week or two.
I'm glad Rusty is gentle. I had a dog once, called Rusty, because he was a rust colour.

The teacher mentioned her dog, named because of its colour, hoping Dean would relate it to his own dog. He did. The next morning, having read his diary, Dean approached the teacher and said, "Uh, uh...I...we..call our dog Rusty because he has some rust on him."

Not only was this the first time Dean had approached this teacher for anything but directions, in the two months she had taught him, to her knowledge it was the first time he had used "because" in the school situation, and, interestingly, it appeared in his writing that same day. This is a good example of talk arising out of writing, and writing arising out of talk.

April 9

Dean: My favorite animal is a mouse, But I like my Dog and my hamster. But a mouse is my Best animal. hamsters are Part of the mouse family, Because hamsters look like mice But hamsters have a shorter tail than mice.

Dean has not had as much time to write since he has taken some time from his fifteen minute writing period to read the teacher's reply from the day before, and to talk to her. The topic "mice" probably reflects the fact that the class had acquired two guinea pigs the day before.

Later, the same day, Dean approached the teacher to ask, "W..when will we get our Diaries back? This afternoon or Monday?" A little later, after watching a filmstrip about the sea he

asked, "D..did the c..crab die?"

Dean's diary has obviously become important to him and has enabled him to talk to the teacher, perhaps seeing her for the first time as someone other than an authority figure who gives directions. Not only can he come to her to tell about his experience, he is able to ask for information rather than just seeking directions about what to do.

On Monday Dean approached the teacher before school with, "I..I'm learning to ride a bike." As the diaries were handed out he was practically bursting with anticipation as you can see from his entry:

April 12
Dean: Sometime in the summer we are Going frog hunting. frogs live By marshes and swamps. We went Before and I wanted to catch a Bull frog or toad. But we never found any frogs. We might go to look for frogs another time. I am learning how to ride a bike without anyone helping me. My Dog is five years old or five mounth old. in 1975 my hamster had seven Bady hamsters. When the hamster Got older we Gave away 6 hamsters and kept one. Some hamster only live for two years. My hamster is living past 2 years. I think my hamster has been living for four years or 3.

All this is less than fifteen minutes! How important this communication had become was apparent in the next weeks:

April 19 - In a letter to his pen pal Dean confides, "I have a dog called Rusty because he is a rust colour."

April 26 - Dean returned from Drumheller with Dinosaur bones to show the class. As he spoke, a dead silence fell over his classmates who seemed to sense the importance of the occasion - it was the first time Dean had spoken before the class. The same afternoon our principal asked Dean to show the bones to the Grade One Class. The next day Dean wrote:

April 27
Dean: When I showed the Dinosaur Bones to the Grade 1er's they liked them...The grade oner's never saw a real Dinosaur Bone Before.

And finally, after the class had been discussing hang gliding, Dean wrote:

May 6
Dean: I always wanted to fly. At home I flap my arms and jump off the dresser in my Bedroom. I just go 3 feet in the air and then I land on my Bed.

The principal, who taught the class that day, answered his diary:

I am glad you are only jumping three feet -- I am afraid you might get hurt. I saw them hang gliding at the big hill last night.
Have you ever read the story about the boy named Icarus that tried to fly just like you did? The librarian will try to find the story for you I think.

The door to a whole new interest was opened as we see from Dean's entries:

May 12
Dean: The story of Icarus was good. his father was a perisiner on the inland.

May 13
Dean: Icarus made his wings out of wax. he got the feathers from the sea gal feathers. his father told him not to fly to High or else the wings will melt.

May 14
Dean: Icarus was Going Down when his wings were melting he landed in the water. he almost drowned. he got saved By his father, his father's name was Daedalus (Dead,a,lus).

May 17
Dean: I wonder if Daedalus was put Back in to Jail. No planes were made in those Days. they had to fly with wings.

This interest culminated the day we had been discussing how someone was killed hang gliding, and Dean told his hushed and attentive classmates the story of Icarus.

This event certainly supports the Writing Research Team's contention that giving talk a regular and valued place in the classroom with an open agenda and encouraging children to conduct their own unsystematic explorations in their talking and writing without fear of censure have potential for tapping a child's deep concerns and interest, facilitating motivated enquiry.[14] Dean still stutters, but perhaps the confidence he is gaining in using language could be the first step in dealing with that problem.

As we leave Dean discussing Greek mythology with his classmates, you may well say, "Yes, it was a valuable approach for one student, but what about the other members of the class? Is this approach as valuable for them? Surely, the question might be asked, should one mark their errors in the diaries so they get some benefit from this fifteen minute writing each day?"

In the first place, "...language flows when they feel they are making a genuine communication--as opposed to a phoney one for someone who doesn't want what you're giving him but merely wants to check up on whether you <u>can</u> give it."[15] With this approach in mind, rather than mark their errors directly, an effort was made to include in the replies to the students the correct spelling or grammar of any errors in their writing. The following are a few examples to show what happened in their spelling and vocabulary development using this approach:

<u>April 12</u>

Carl: ...So we can get the car packed to go to the airport. And when we get there it will be about 7:00 o'clock. Then we have breakfast and then we get on the plain.

Teacher: Dear Carl,
Will the plane land anywhere, or will it fly directly there?
I wonder where you'll go through Customs.

<u>April 13</u>

Carl: The plane will stop at Spokane and San Fransisco. As soon as we get there my uncle is going to be there at 1:00 o'clock.

Carl has corrected his spelling error. This was the same boy who displayed his ability to use language in complex ways when he described the pictures earlier, but he sometimes neglected to communicate his ideas clearly in writing.

The exchanges in the diary can encourage vocabulary development also:

Friday, April 9
Mary: What I did April 8
I helped my Mom cook. I like cooking. I cook cookies almost every Saturday. next week on Friday 16 I am going camping with the brownies. I have to cook cookies I have to cook cookies for my brother all the time. I cook cookies there gone in two days.

Teacher: Dear Mary,
The cookies that you bake must be very good if they are gone in two days!
What kind of cookies will you make for Brownie Camp?

Monday, April 12
Mary: ...On Sunday I baked cookies. They were raisen cookies.

Hence, without any red marks on their work, the children, their self-respect intact, have begun to make the corrections on their own.

From the entries in their diaries I was also able to make decisions about where individual help was needed. For example, Dean's use of capital D, B and G throughout his writing made me aware that he had difficulty with the lower case d, b and g; on the other hand, his use of the possessive in entries such as: "John's hamster's name is Star.", showed his advanced grasp of the skill in this area. (This is the same child who rated in the bottom 10th percentile on a standardized language test) I also found that students who had not yet gone from printing to writing made the transition writing in their diaries where the atmosphere was "without fear of censure".

Finally, the diaries would have their place on the grounds alone that they enabled the teacher to learn to know the students.

YES, BUT...

Classroom teachers who have read this far will, no doubt, have many questions about the amount of time and effort such an appraisal of the child's use of language would take. With a classroom of 25 - 35 students it indeed appears to be a formidable task! This might be the place to argue for the "Preparation Time" our colleagues in the Junior and Senior High Schools enjoy, but with the apparent futility of such a venture in mind, let us turn instead to a look at classroom organization.

The 25-student classroom which has been described is in a school with a supportive principal who promotes an individualized approach to teaching and who has encouraged the attempts at language development that have been outlined. Regular conferences with each child are an essential part of the individualized reading program being followed. The students are asked not to disturb the teacher during a conference and they respect this request, for each child anxiously anticipates his own undisturbed conference. As the child reads out loud, the teacher is able to assess any difficulties he is experiencing in reading. In the child's record book, she checks over the list of stories he has been reading, asking him to re-tell a story he has read, or make up an ending for one he has not finished. This is also an excellent opportunity to have him explain what is happening in a picture, as we did with Dean and Carl. On the same day, the teacher might keep a record of the child's talk and activities with his peers by jotting down her observations several times during the morning or afternoon. Using information from these conferences as well as every bit of evidence she can glean throughout the day, the teacher will soon have a picture of each child's language development. Then in all her conversations with them (person-to-person as well as written) she will be able to encourage those aspects that are weak.

We have seen in Dean's case study a dramatic demonstration of the supportive reciprocal relationship between talking and writing. Recognizing that fostering this relationship can aid learning, what better credo could a teacher subscribe to than:

> ...schools need to make provision for thinking to go on above ground, which for the most part means in language. Of course, there are those pupils who will do very well by just thinking--they're the ones who have done very well in the past. But what they've been doing inside their heads others manifestly haven't been doing, and it's the latter who we have to take deliberate action to help. Getting

them to talk and write is part of the answer to the problems of enabling them to think, since these processes involve thinking and yet, unlike the 'pure', chin-on-fist type of thinking, may be got going and kept going in all sorts of ways and with all sorts of different motivations and reasons.16

APPENDIX

The Objectives for the Teacher-Child Dialogue

1. To report on present and past experiences, searching for the fullest interpretation
   by
   i analysing the sequence of events
   ii extracting the central meaning
   iii referring to important detail
   iv recognising relationships
   v making comparisons and recognising similarities and differences
   vi analysing and classifying on the basis of the above features
   vii reflecting on the meaning of the experience.

2. To project beyond the observable situation
   (a) arising out of an immediate situation by
   i recognising a number of possibilities
   ii projecting into the feelings, experiences and viewpoint of others
   iii recognising incongruity and problems
   iv looking forward and planning a sequence of actions based on the immediate situation
   v predicting the outcome of forward planning from the immediate situation

   (b) directed away from the immediate situation by
   vi referring to the detail and sequence of anticipated events which are not an extension of the immediate situation
   vii reflecting on possible alternatives and consequent anticipated events
   viii projecting and reflecting on the anticipated reaction and feelings of others.

3. To project through the imagination
   by
   i. reporting (as in 1) and projecting (as in 2) within an imagined situation based on real life happenings
   ii reporting (as in 1) and projecting (as in 2) within an imagined situation based on fantasy
   iii developing a story based on real life or fantasy situations.

4. To approach logical reasoning
   by
   i explaining a process
   ii recognising and explaining causes
   iii recognising, exploring and explaining relationships
   iv giving justifications for actions and judgements
   v reflecting on facts and conditions and drawing conclusions
   vi making deductions
   vii recognising and explaining general principles
   viii inquiring about any of the above. (Schools Council, 1975, pp. 36, 37)

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